

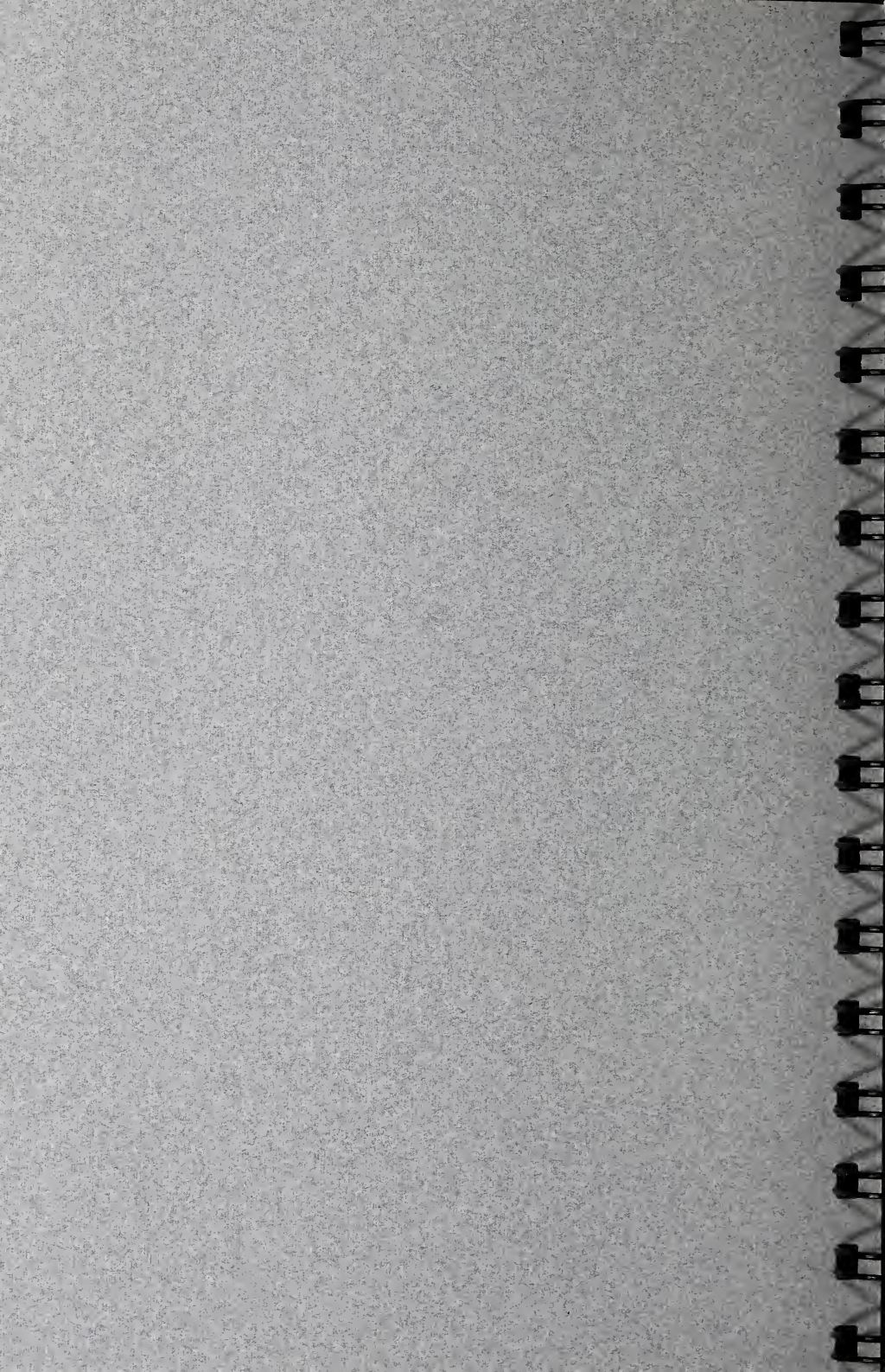
Copiah-Lincoln Community College

Microcosm

XXVII

2000

Wesson Campus



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editorial note

In T. S. Eliot's vortistic poem "*The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*," the protagonist states, "Time for you and time for me, And time yet for a hundred indecisions, And a hundred visions and revisions..."

If there is one thing that life has taught us, it is the illusive nature of time. Most things on this planet, whether it be a tank of gasoline or a bottle of wine, are concrete, and their diminishing is a very visible act. Time is not. Nothing else gives so great an illusion of security, only to disappear with a voracious swiftness that seems somehow impossible to emit from something so accommodating.

We were a perfect example of this phenomenon when time left us "turning and turning in the widening gyre" as we naively birthed this publication.

Now that *Microcosm* has been printed, cut, and bound, we find ourselves being pulled onward, "like boats against the current," toward the next revision, the next chapter, the next volume that time presents to us. Whether this next tome is in the form of marriage, graduation, or entrance into the labor force, the change is inevitable, and time marches on.

With the closing of this publication, we also close another volume of our lives, moving on to whatever presents itself next. But, as Mrs. Crews preaches relentlessly, one can always "revise, revise, revise!" We will always carry the knowledge, experiences, and memories that we have acquired in our relatively short time here with us as we rush against the omnipotent, illusive nature of time.

We leave the works in this publication as testament to the diminutive moments that we paused here.

*The woods are lovely, dark, and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

Robert Frost

literary hall of fame

Catherine Perry Cotten



Cotten is presently Director of Information and Research for Jones County Junior College. In this position she is responsible for institutional assessment and promoting and managing externally funded initiatives for the college.

Dr. Cotten has taught mathematics and computer science at elementary through college levels in West Virginia, Maryland, and Mississippi and has 28 years of experience in education. In Mississippi, she has taught for Petal Public Schools, Columbia Public Schools, Copiah-Lincoln Community College, Pearl River Community College, and as an adjunct instructor for the University of Southern Mississippi.

Cotten has been the recipient of numerous federal, state, and private foundation grants. She is presently directing 2.8 million dollars worth of National Science Foundation grants. In addition, she is responsible for nurturing JCJC arts and humanities faculty in the development of those skills necessary for successfully acquiring externally competitive funding.

The author of many publications and national presentations in mathematics and advanced technology education, she was recipient of Mississippi's first Presidential Award in Mathematics Teaching and was also selected for the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Master Teacher Program for Mathematics Teaching held at Princeton University.

on writing ...

Catherine Perry Cotten

Mark Twain said, "A powerful agent is the right word. Whenever we come upon one of those intensely right words in a book or a newspaper the resulting effect is physical as well as spiritual, and electrically prompt." I am not a novelist or a writer for a newspaper, but I do write technical documents. Technical writing can mean success or failure for an organization. Therefore, it must be precise and accurate. "Anybody can have ideas—the difficulty is to express them without squandering a quire of paper on an idea that ought to be reduced to one glittering paragraph," said Mark Twain. This is very true for the technical writer.

My degrees and other course work are in mathematics, statistics and computer science. As a teacher of these subjects, I have required my students to incorporate writing into their classroom activities. I believe writing is a crucial component of the mathematics and science student's learning and the path toward a successful career. It is just as important for the mathematician to convey in writing a new mathematical model that can describe the path of a hurricane as it is for a novelist to write fiction which creates enjoyment in readers. We all know the necessity for the computer programmer to write clear documentation for a new piece of computer software! The world wide web has created a new medium for writers and a need for new techniques in writing. Will the WWW be for the technical writer or for the creative writer? Maybe, it will be for both.

Writing is not a class in school or in college. Writing is not a "heavy burden" imposed upon a person by a teacher or a work supervisor. Writing is a learned skill, a talent, and a necessity for a successful career. As Mark Twain might have said "Anybody can have ideas. Can you express them in writing?"

**The following Copenhag-Lincoln Community College students
had works to place in literary competitions.**

southern literary festival

Arie Wilson

second place for the short story "I Ain't Crazy"

Daniel Holloway

honorable mention for the informal essay "Ephemera"

**These works are published in the fall issue of "bits and
pieces : athanasia."**

mcccwa

Misti Thornhill

honorable mention for the formal essay "The Adam and Eve Syndrome"*
and the informal essay "The Walls of Life"*

Daniel Holloway

honorable mention for the informal essay "Ephemera," third place for the
short story "An Autumn Without Trees,"* and first place for the one-act play
"Boats Against the Current"*

Arie Wilson

third place for the short story "I Ain't Crazy" and first place for the one-act
play "Boats Against the Current"*

Microcosm 1999 received second place in the professionally printed
journal category.

"Bits and Pieces" Fall 1999 received an honorable mention in the in-house
publication category.

"bits and pieces : athanasia" received first place in the in-house publication
category.

*** - These works are printed in this publication.**

The following authors' works are printed in the spring issue of "bits and pieces : blast."

The Unheard Cry

Melody Carothers
Wesson Attendance Center
Second Place : Informal Essay

The Mezzazine Floor

Alisha Davis
Lawrence County High School
Second Place : Poetry

Skyla's Choice

Brooke Campbell
Brookhaven High School
Second Place : Short Story

Prisoner's Pride

Joanna Biglane
Cathedral High School
Second Place : Formal Essay

Control Conquers All

Dianna Williams
Hazlehurst High School
Third Place : Informal Essay

Nature at Play - A Haiku

Tara Bloodsworth
Enterprise High School
Third Place : Poetry

Ty and Monica

Ashley Bowman
Wesson Attendance Center
Third Place : Short Story

Blind Assumptions

Deighton K. Zerby
Cathedral High School
Third Place : Formal Essay

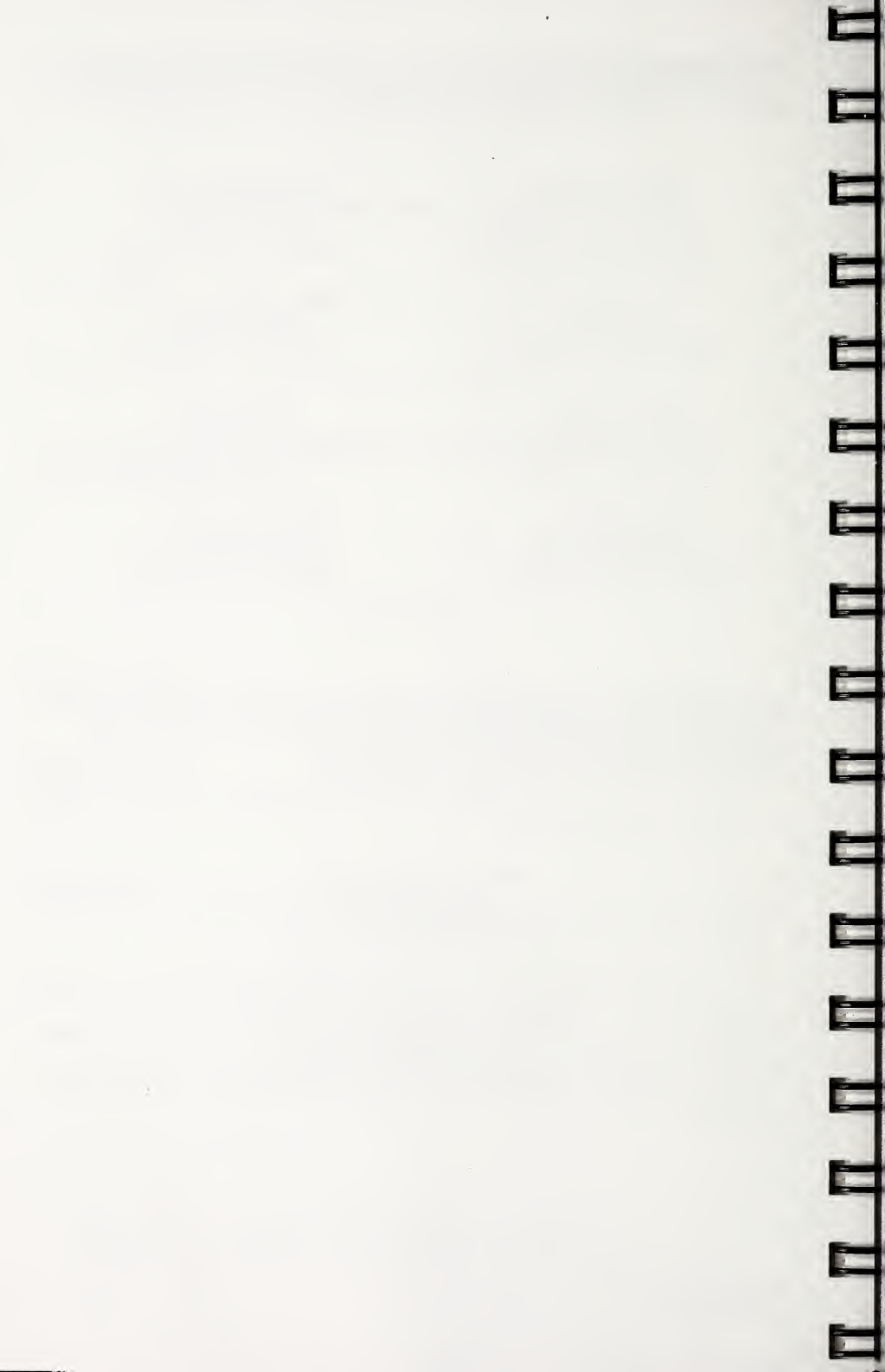
The following authors recieved honorable mention in the Microcosm Literary Competition.

Adventure of the Anubis

Mathew A. Tolbert
Homeschooled
Honorable Mention : Short Story

Senseless Slaughter of Mockingbirds

Sarah Stricklin
Wesson Attendance Center
Honorable Mention : Formal Essay



One-Act Play

Boats Against the Current

Daniel Holloway and Arie Wilson

Characters:

Amy young, beautiful, independent twenty-seven year old, columnist for a monthly New York social magazine, shares an apartment with Marianne and Finn

Finn sarcastic, twenty-six year old charming philanderer, well read, struggling author, living off borrowed money

Marianne cynical, twenty-seven year old self-employed shop owner, feels more experienced and worldly than her roommates

Catherine thirty-five years old, unhappily married to Tate, out-going and party-minded yet constricted by her marriage

Tate believes in a simple life, thirty-six year old with a history of bad jobs which makes the only job available to him the cleaning of the primate cages at the city zoo thus making him the butt of many jokes

Shirtless Man

Elton

Michaela

Setting:

At the immediate front of the stage an erected framework gives the illusion that the audience is peering through a panoramic window. The room, a large loft apartment in New York, is very dimly lit (no overhead lights). It is easily seen that it belongs to a twenty-something group. In the center of the room there is a large, low-to-the-ground coffee table scattered with magazines. A large, black couch is in the right corner limiting the audience's view of any activities on it. At its left arm there is a small table with a lava lamp resting on it. Along the right wall is a loveseat guarded on each side by two, deep green papasans. Off to one side is the doorway to the stairwell. Opposite the

audience is the kitchen and the doorway to the bathroom. The left wall contains three doors, each leading to a separate bedroom. Also, a large shelf stands holding the television and stereo. It holds three other shelves; one with magazines and framed pictures, one with various clocks of differing shapes and sizes, and one filled with books. A plethora of framed paintings adorn the walls. The only light comes from two halogen lamps strategically placed in the two far most corners, and many groups of different candles. A small fluorescent light burns above the kitchen sink.

Scene 1
"Beginnings"

(The curtain opens to a totally black stage dotted by burning candles. The halogens slowly intensify bringing an eerie dimness to the room. A bottle of wine sits next to the lava lamp. Soft noises emit from the blind side of the couch. Footsteps and muffled voices rise from the stairwell.)

Amy: (*pops head abruptly from couch and looks toward stair well*) Stop. Someone's coming.

Male voice: No, don't worry about it.

Amy: No, I heard somebody! (*stands up, clothed from the waist down, but only in her bra above, then picks her shirt up from the floor*)

Male voice: (*as she is putting on her shirt*) It's probably just a car, or one of those nasty taxis out on twenty-sixth. (*voices and the sound of keys in the door*)

Amy: (*wide-eyed sarcastic*) No, that is someone at the door. (*from stage left Finn and Catherine enter, talking, carrying paper bags, suddenly stop, turn and stare at Amy and the shirtless male who has now risen from the couch*)

Finn: (*turning to Catherine*) It's too easy. You can have this one. (*Catherine stares at the shirtless man and grins*)

Amy: (*looks down and swings her arm toward shirtless man*) This is ... Oh, well, never mind, just get out. (*Catherine and Finn applaud as shirtless man exits stage left*)

Catherine: Well...

Finn: (*jokingly*) Working on another article for your harlequin

themed magazine? Did you reach the final copy or is it still a rough draft?

Amy: Well, at least I'm writing.

Finn: (*places his hand over his heart*) Touché. (*carries bags to kitchen*)

(*stage left, Tate and Marianne enter carrying more bags*)

Catherine: What took you so long?

Marianne: We would have been here sooner, but a rain-soaked mutt took a crap out there on the sidewalk, and, wouldn't you know it, Tate heads right for it like it was whiskey and he was a wino.

Amy: Well, old habits die hard.

Finn: (*from kitchen*) And fresh shit scoops best.

Catherine: (*puts arms around Tate*) You guys leave him alone. Someone has to clean those cages. Think of all the children that file into the city zoo everyday. Think of all the magic and sparkles in their eyes . . . and they wouldn't have any of that if the monkey cages were caked in a six-inch layer of doo-doo.

Tate: (*hollowly*) Thank you, honey.

Catherine: And in just three months he's going to be promoted to elephant dung.

Finn: (*sarcastically*) That's great, Tate, and it's important to have a dream; but why don't you get a . . . well . . . pardon the pun, less shitty job?

Tate: Well, don't you think if I had a better option I would grab hold and take it.

Amy: (*moving into kitchen to help Finn with the groceries*) Well, Tate, there's that job in the copy room at "X." Admittedly, it's a job on roughly the same level as prison work, but it's a steady job with an okay paycheck and no animal excrement.

Tate: (*raising eyebrows in mock interest*) No more mandrill farts?

(*the group gives off a quick laugh*)

Amy: (*wiping her eyes*) It's good that you still have a sense of humor about it all. Especially since we've ridden you so hard about it. It would definitely stop the picking if you took the job.

Catherine: (*turning to face Tate*) Yeah, why don't you take it?

Just give it a try, you may like it. They would still give you back your old job if you decided that you didn't like the printing thing.

Finn: Good pooper-scoopers are definitely hard to find.

Catherine: (*shooting him a dirty look before turning back to Tate*) Don't listen to him, he borrows money. He's never worked a day in his sad, pathetic life.

Finn: Hey, I'm a writer.

Catherine: Like I said, he's never worked a day in his life.

Amy: (*finally sitting back down on loveseat*) It's no problem, Tate. The manager of the printing division owes me a favor, and they're looking for someone who can do the work. I know that you've got kind of a checkered job past, but they're not too picky at "X."

Finn: They hired you, didn't they?

Amy: At least I'm employed! (*back to Tate*) Really, it's no big deal. I can call tomorrow morning and you can be at work by Monday.

Catherine: (*almost begging*) Please, Tate. Just give it a try.

Tate: You all now that I hate, I mean *hate*, being cramped up indoors with a bunch of uptight, well dressed people who rush around thinking about their next car or what they can add to their gaudy mansions to make the people next door jealous. They keep their swimming pools blue, and their flowers blooming, even in January, all in an attempt to look like they're relaxed and in touch with all the beautiful things that they run by every single day. I'd rather die than be like that. It's like Polonious said in *Hamlet*, "To thine own self be true."

(*there is a short silence, even Finn seems to realize the seriousness of Tate's beliefs*)

But, (*turns to face Catherine*) if it's what you need to be happy, then it's what I need to stay alive.

Amy: (*as Catherine hugs Tate*) Well, okay. I'll call in tomorrow and call in my favor, let you know sometime Sunday and then you can start a new job Monday morning. Maybe it's even a new life.

Marianne: (*turning from putting groceries into their cabinets, dryly*) Life sucks.

Finn: (*putting an arm around Marianne*) We love you too.

Catherine: (to Amy) Thanks so very much. This means a lot.
(takes Tate's arm and continues speaking to Amy) I'll call you later. I've got lots to tell you. Bye.

(Tate and Catherine exit stage left, Marianne leaves kitchen and walks into her room, exiting stage right)

Finn: (sitting in a papasan near Amy) Hey beautiful, I got something for you.

Amy: (lying back on loveseat, uninterested) Really? I hope it might be some of my pride. I think most of it's still with my male companion, running shirtless somewhere along Broadway, or maybe Times Square by now.

Finn: No, I'm afraid that that portion of your subtle ego has been dashed on the proverbial rocks of shame. This is something I think you'll need though. (reaches behind his back)

Amy: Okay, what is it?

Finn: (pulling box out from behind his back) It's a box of condoms. Look, jumbo.

Amy: (lazily taking them from him) Are they lubricated? (they laugh a little, Amy with mock gratitude) Thank you, this means so much to me.

Finn: I figured a girl who works at a magazine called "X" would need a little protection, and not just mace. (somewhat perplexed) Where do they get a name like "X" anyway? Is it some form of porn thing?

Amy: (lightly patting him on the face) Don't you wish? No, I don't write articles for a year round skin catalogue for perverts. "X" is about women being the masters of their own destiny. You know, the "X" chromosome and all? I guess that it could also be "X" as in ex-husband.

Finn: (smiling) Oh, I see. A bra burning thing. I noticed you still had yours on when we came in.

Amy: (reaching under the cushion revealing an envelope, smiling) Well, I believe that I've got something that would interest you too.

Finn: (standing, as if he's uninterested) What? Is CD-By-Mail threatening to sue me again?

Amy: No But Amberstone Publishing Companies spent thirty-two cents to send you a letter.

Finn: (no longer faking disinterest) Amberstone!? Did you

open it?

Amy: (*grinning*) No, I, unlike some people, have a little respect for people's privacy.

Finn: Give it to me.

Amy: Nope. As one of your little books says, "Absence makes the heart grow fonder."

(*Finn sits on top of her and wrestles the letter from her hands, Amy laughs and screams, Marianne enters stage right*)

Marianne: (*in a motherly tone*) What are you two doing? You're almost at the combined age of sixty; you shouldn't act like that.

Finn: (*getting letter free and opening it, he reads*) "Dear Mr. Eliot. We thank you for your interesting manuscript. However, we do not feel that it is worthy of publication at this time..."

Amy: (*mean-spirited*) Another one for your collection.

Finn: (*ignores her, continues reading*) "...I feel drawn to tell you that although we here at Amberstone did not choose to publish your work, it was an office favorite. The entire third floor found your description of the battered corpse ... well ... hilarious."

Amy: (*unbelieving*) What? No way, that's not what they wrote. Let me see.

Finn: (*still ignoring her*) "It was unanimously decided that, not since the basket case from Maine State Mental Ward wrote the classic Fuzzy Swingset has a work so bad been sent to us. Perhaps you should look up a career dealing with animal feces. Crap seems to be what you work with best. (*hollowly*) Sincerely. Head of Publications. Mr. David K. Royals."

(*Finn stands unmoving as Amy jerks the paper from him*)

Amy: Oh shut up! No self respected publisher would write th . . . (*face contorts, almost sorrow*) Oh my God. (*looks at Marianne*) They did say that!

Marianne: (*looking*) Well, we all knew it.

Amy: Marianne, come on. Have a heart. (*turning to Finn*) Are you okay with this?

Finn: (*slouching onto the loveseat, wounded but not dead*) Yeah, I'm okay. It's only one of five. I've still got Typhoon,

Golden Pond, Contemporary Publishing and Gargoyle.
Gargoyle Books prints a lot of junk, so I guess they're my
best bet. (*mocking an English accent*) Fear not, ladies.
The pain is not too great. Tomorrow I will run faster.
Stretch out my hands further. And one fine morning . . .

Marianne: (*changing the subject*) Yeah, well guess who else
is in the proverbial boat beating against the current?

Amy: (*sitting next to Finn*) What? Who?

Marianne: (*eyes wide*) Catherine!

Finn: (*obviously over it*) What about her?

Marianne: Well, (*sitting opposite them on the coffee table*)
she told me today in the grocery store that she was
having . . . My God, she would kill me if she knew I was
just blurting this out to you two like this. (*she breathes
deep*) She's having . . .

Amy: A baby?

Finn: A lesbian experience?

Marianne: No! An affair!

Amy: (*somewhat shocked*) An affair? With who? How?

Finn: Well the how is pretty easy. You see when a man and a
woman love each other. . .

Amy: (*serious*) You know what I mean.

Marianne: I don't know who; she wouldn't tell me. How? I
don't know that either. I suppose they met at a club or a
restaurant or something. You know how Catherine is. She
can't stand to be alone. She's got to be out meeting
people and feeling like she's needed by them.

Amy: Does Tate know?

Marianne: (*acts as if question is idiotic*) Well, of course not.
That would be stupid.

Amy: How long has this been going on?

Marianne: Well, I'm not one to go busting up into someone
else's business, but she said that she met him about
nine months ago. She made this long drawn-out speech
about love at first sight – a total crock – and started
spouting out those gushy lines from romance novels. You
know, the kind that make you want to lick a subway toilet
to get your mind clean.

Finn: (*getting interested himself*) And how long has she actu-
ally been . . . taming the shrew?

Marianne: Sex?

Amy: (*sarcastically*) No, their TV watching habits. Of course sex, you idiot!

Marianne: About two months now. She never gave me an exact date, but that's the general time I got from talking to her.

Finn: (*lying back, surprised*) Catherine is having an affair. Another reason never to get married. You get stuck with the same woman all your life.

Amy: (*turning to face Finn*) Well, you've been seeing that Michaela girl pretty regularly.

Marianne: That means you've slept with her on more than three occasions.

Finn: (*defensive*) Hey, believe me, I've got no desire to settle down. Relationships are even taboo in my mind.

Amy: (*walking over and picking up wine bottle from next to lava lamp*) Amen! (*she takes a drink*) So, now that all the night's earth shattering events have been brought into the light of my lava lamp, let's open a new bottle of wine, drink till we think we're innocent again, and crawl to bed.

Finn and Marianne: (*simultaneously*) Here, here.
(*Finn walks to kitchen and begins to remove wine bottle from above the refrigerator while Marianne turns on the radio, Amy crawls across the floor until she can rest her head on the table holding the lava lamp*)

Amy: (*"Yesterday" by The Beatles fills the apartment*) I swear. Someday this world is going to look new again.
(*the halogens dim and the stage darkens completely except for the sparkling of the candles which blow out one by one*)

Scene 2 "Middles"

(It is a week later in the same room. The clocks on the shelf are chiming 10 o'clock. With each ring the halogens grow a little brighter. Marianne and Amy are sitting in front of the television, Marianne is paying more attention to her legal pad than the program.)

Amy: Marianne, these clocks are going to drive me right into a room next to the author of Fuzzy Swingset one day!
(points toward clocks on shelf) How many times do you need to know it's ten o'clock anyway?
(Marianne continues, not paying attention to Amy. Amy stares at her in silence for a while before speaking)

Amy: Are you watching this?

Marianne: (Obviously not paying attention) Uh-huh.

Amy: Really?

Marianne: Uh-huh.

Amy: (takes pad from Marianne and looks at it) What's this?

Marianne: The shipping list from the store. I have to get eight crates out of here before Tuesday.

Amy: How can you worry about work while watching **Citizen Kane**? You're watching a whole man's life unfold before your eyes and you're worried about crates?

Marianne: I'm sorry, money takes precedence over a roll of film containing a fictional character's exploits. Without money we couldn't have the TV, or the cable, or the power to run either. When Mom and Dad were divorcing more than just the truth was lost in their judicial crusade; money disappeared too. I know what it's like without it. Believe me, without money it's just an existence; not life.

Amy: No, without money you're Finn. (both laugh)
(there is a knock at the door)

Marianne: It's after ten. Who in the world would be coming to visit us at this hour? Finn and Michaela are back in the bedroom. Who else do we know?
(Amy shrugs then goes and opens door, Catherine and a male enter)

Amy: (excited) Hey, Catherine! (hugs her, then with apprehension) And who is this?

Man: (extends hand) Hi, I'm Elton. You must be Amy. Catherine's told me a lot about you.

Marianne: Is that Catherine? (Catherine runs to hug Marianne) What brings you here after ten? Is that him?

Catherine: Yeah, that's him. (turns to Elton and Amy) You can come in Elton, they won't bite.
(enter Finn and Michaela stage left, Michaela has

luggage)

Finn: That might not be true of Amy. Watch out.

Catherine: (*pointing to each one*) Elton, this is Finn, Michaela and Marianne. They are all really nice, except for Finn, who suffers from an extreme excess of sarcasm.

Finn: (*as Elton and the others settle into seats*) Guilty. (*he walks Michaela to the door*)

Amy: Where are you going with the luggage, Michaela? Did you finally find out what a jerk Finn is?

Michaela: (*from doorway*) No, I have to be in London on business by tomorrow, so I'm taking the last flight out tonight.

Amy: Well, bring me back some kidney pie or something.

Michaela: All right. (*to Finn*) I'll call you when I get there. Think about what I said. (*picking up luggage and kissing him gently on the cheek*) I love you. (*exits stage left*)

Catherine: (*eyeing Finn suspiciously*) That sounds like more than just sex.

Finn: What does "more than just sex" sound like exactly? (*seems to really notice that Catherine is there*) What are you doing here this late? Where's Tate? (*sits on floor opposite them*)

Marianne: **Finn?!**

Catherine: (*not upset*) No, it's all right. He's at home. Probably asleep. (*studying her hands*) He doesn't leave the house much since he got that new job last week. In fact, he doesn't do much of anything since he got that job. Just sits there in his recliner reading some book by an author I've never heard of. Sometimes he pulls his chair up the window and just stares for hours. (*pauses, smiling slightly*) What a bore!

Amy: (*rises, lights the candles*) Finn, why don't you get a bottle of wine and open it for us? (*he retrieves the bottle, uncorks it, takes the bottle and a handful of glasses to the table*)

Catherine: (*as Finn fills the glasses*) Well, with Michaela gone you don't have much need for your bed tonight, right?

Finn: (*suspiciously*) Only to sleep in.

Catherine: (*bubbly*) I was hoping you would want to stay on the couch and let me and Elton have your bed tonight.

I'll pay you if you want me to.

Elton: (*uncomfortable*) Now, Catherine, we don't have to

Catherine: No, these are my friends, it's okay.

Finn: (*looks uneasily to Amy and Marianne*) You don't have to pay me. You can have it.

Catherine: Thanks. (*takes Elton's hand, grab their wine, and exit stage right into the bedroom*)

Finn: I never thought a married woman would be in my bed without me.

Marianne: Speaking of in your bed, what did Michaela say that you are supposed to think about?

Finn: (*shudders*) Marriage . . . but I don't want to talk about it.

Amy: (*pulls her feet up on the couch*) Marriage. That's a big change.

Marianne: (*somewhat gruffly*) Everything changes, that's the way the mechanics of the world grind. No commitment . . . anywhere. And even commitment isn't a guarantee. Look at my parents. (*points toward bedroom door*) Look at Catherine. (*almost sympathetically*) With or without commitment, things change.

Finn: (*lying back on floor*) Not me. I'm never going to change.

Amy: If you never change, you'll never know the beauty of finding Kane's Rosebud again.
(*halogens fade until nothing but the candles remain and Catherine can be heard giggling slightly in the darkness*)

Scene 3 "Endings"

(It is one week later in the apartment. The halogens come up slowly revealing boxes piled up in many corners. Various items are obviously missing. All but one of the clocks is missing and all the books are gone. The couch is missing as well. The table supporting the lava lamp sits alone in its corner. Footsteps are heard coming up the stairs. The door opens and Amy, Marianne and Finn enter dressed in funeral attire. All three look solemn and silent. Amy enters the kitchen and produces three glasses and a bottle of wine.)

Amy: (*sitting down with Finn and Marianne on the floor, she*

pours the wine as she speaks) It's only fitting, I thought, that we drink this last bottle together. It's the last from the case we bought when you guys moved in here.

Marianne: We bought it two years ago when we went on that trip to Boston. *(she begins laughing)* Bought it from that ridiculous Chinese man who kept calling you *Fwinn*. *(they laugh a forced, strained laugh followed by a few moments of silence)*

Marianne: *(her eyes become moistened)* Why did he do it?

Finn: The why really doesn't matter now that it's done.

Amy: I should have never told Tate about that job. He was happy where he was. No good can come of changing in an attempt to elevate your happiness. *(pauses, when she speaks again her voice quivers)* I sure never thought he'd kill himself.

Finn: *(solemn)* A lot of things have happened that I never thought would.

Amy: *(with a slight forced chuckle)* Yeah, who would have thought that you would actually have a book published.

Marianne: A good one to boot. I bet Amberstone is regretting at least one letter that they sent out. *(there is a pause)* Do you think he killed himself because Catherine left, or Catherine left because he killed himself?

Amy: Was she at the funeral? I didn't see her, but I didn't look toward the balcony.

Finn: No. She wasn't there.

Marianne: Catherine always did need somebody to need her. I just hope Elton shows her that other side of forever that she could never seem to grasp herself.

(Finn stands and walks to some nearby boxes)

Finn: Is this where life takes everybody? Does it take Marianne off to the West End chasing after the ever-elusive dollar? Does it take me away from you guys, the people I've considered family for the past two years, and into the arms of a woman I'm not sure if I love or not? *(he wipes his eyes)* Where does it take Tate? Does it take Catherine off into the sunset or God knows where else?

Marianne: *(calmly)* Sometimes.

Amy: I guess I'm the one left behind. Not touched by

Catherine's impulsive urges or the tickings of Marianne's clocks. Too much of a coward to commit like Finn, and not brave enough to stop like Tate.

(there is a beeping, Finn reaches into his jacket and produces a pager, he looks at it)

Finn: I hate to do this now, but timing never seems to be right for anything I guess. That was Gargoyle Books. I have to meet with a publicist at The Cotton Wool. *(he pauses at doorway, then turns to face them)* Am I going to see you guys again?

Amy: Yes. Dinner at The Russian Tea Room on Thursday night? *(she looks at him surprised)* Did you forget already?

Finn: No. I just was wondering if you guys were paying? *(he exits stage left)*

Marianne: *(standing and heading toward her old bedroom)*
Well, I have to get a few things out of the old bedroom too. It's kind of like that poet in one of Finn's books said . . . "Since they were not the one dead, they went on to their affairs."

Amy: *(whispering)* Frost.

Marianne: Excuse me?

Amy: *(louder)* Robert Frost. That's the name of the poet.
(Marianne shrugs and continues toward her old room)

Amy: Don't forget that clock. Like you need another.

Marianne: *(taking the clock in her hands and looking back)*
One can never have too much time, I guess. *(she exits to the bedroom)*
(the lights dim slightly as Amy stands up and walks over to the small table supporting the lone lava lamp, she sits down next to it and looks into its swirling insides)

Amy: Well, I guess it's a brand new world. And I guess that it's inevitable that this one will change too. *(she looks into the lamp)* We're a lot alike you know? Both warm and stirred by an unseen hand. Both twisting and writhing in the abyss that surrounds us, just trying to keep it all in place . . . if only for a little while.

(halogens fade, leaving only the lava lamp burning brightly on the empty, black stage, curtain falls)

The Long Road to Nowhere

Ella Kuhn

Setting:

On a dark country road, present day, a girl and her boyfriend are conversing in a car (two chairs sit on a dark stage with a spotlight on them from above).

Characters:

The Guy: In his mid-twenties, intelligent, educated and young, he understands his female companion's mind. He loves her, and in every sense of the word, he is a man.

The Girl: She is an opinionated young woman, also mid-twenties in age, who loves to talk. In every sense, she is a liberated woman, who loves her man.

Guy: So where you wanna go tonight?

Girl: Nowhere particular. Don't you just wanna talk for awhile?

Guy: You can talk, I'll just listen.

Girl: Well, as long as I get to talk. Whatcha want to talk about?

Guy: Didn't you just hear me? What did I say?

Girl: I don't know. I forgot. Oh yeah, you were saying something about politics?

Guy: Ok, whatever.

Girl: How do you feel about abortion?

Guy: Well, actually I think that falls under ethics...but in any case, I think it's a woman's choice.

Girl: Good answer. [*Short pause.*] Well, [*Somewhat annoyed.*] you wanna know what I think? [*Pause.*] Ok, well I think it's the woman's choice too. Besides, I don't want some old white guy that hasn't even had a period before, telling me what I can or can't do with my body. This is mine! [*Pointing to herself.*] You can't tell me what to do with it. That's my business.

Guy: Next question.

Girl: Who you gonna vote for in the approaching election?

Guy: What are my choices?

Girl: There's a son of a previous president, he's the governor of Texas. I think he got caught snorting coke one time.

The public was really taken back by it. Well at least the media made a lot of hype. Hello! Who do you think snorts coke? It's the rich men with shiny sports car and soft suits with nice day jobs, like governors and senators. Then there's some guy from the Senate. And then there's always the rich guys. Everybody thinks they can run this country with a little money and some people who owe them favors.

Guy: What happened to that woman? I would have voted for her but she didn't have any real credibility, except that her husband also ran for President.

Girl: [*Almost militantly.*] Point taken. She claimed lack of funds, and she was credible in her own Mary Tyler Moore-Joan Cleaver sort of way. She did stuff with Red Cross.

Guy: So do lots of other people. They don't run for President because of it.

Girl: Would you vote for me if I ran for President? Don't you think I'm more credible than that woman? Kind of in a Hillary sort of way, huh? Or is it more Madeline?

Guy: This is one of those questions that gets me in trouble no matter how I answer, right?

Girl: Well, would you?

Guy: [*Sighing.*] What are your positions?

Girl: Well, I'm an active member for the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws. Actually all I do is send them twenty-five bucks every year. And, I also agree with about ninety percent of the American Civil Liberties Union's opinion. I like to try new things. I'm Libertarian. I stand for the liberty and prosperity of the common woman, and sometimes the common man. [*Acting like an airhead.*] I submit writings to various amateur publishers. And in my free time I like to bake pies with my mom, talk on the phone with my boyfriend, or just plain hang out with my friends.

Guy: How would you make this country or this world better than it already is?

Girl: If I was president...ummm. Huh huh. I'd legalize marijuana.

Guy: [*Laughing.*] Oh yeah, that's really gonna get you in office.

Girl: Well an estimated eight million people a year in the United States smoke it regularly. That means I got at least eight million, and all their friends. Besides, you know all those senators get high. I'll just be telling people the truth: what they really want to hear.

Guy: People don't want to hear the truth.

Girl: They'll like the way I tell it. I'll make it funny.

Guy: And how is that?

Girl: Well, you know social security ain't gonna be around for long. But people don't want to hear that. So you gotta explain it to them: All right, listen up. There are too many of you Baby Boomers for all of us Generation Xers to support. So look here. You got a few choices. Start saving now, which is what you shoulda been doing a long time ago. Or hit your kids up for your medical care. Or, just move to Mexico or some place like that, to make your money last longer.

Guy: Brilliant. Did you come up with that Mexico idea all by yourself?

Girl: You think I'm playing? I'm being serious. We will not get social security.

Guy: So how are you gonna fix things?

Girl: I'd end the drug war, pardon all the people currently in prison for simple possession of a substance, make 18 the legal age to drink beer and label all cigarette boxes "cancer sticks." And I like to travel. I'd go see people. Like the Pope and Queen Elizabeth. And those other countries' rulers.

Guy: The Pope rules a religion, not a country.

Girl: Yeah, I know, but that religion has like their own city, so that's kinda like a country.

Guy: Whatever. I think you should spend a little more time developing your perspectives on politics. I support you in whatever you do, baby. And I want what you want, as long as it makes you happy.

Girl: So you'll help me develop my main points?

Guy: That's all you. I didn't say I would help. You are in charge of that. I'll give you money when you need it. You can buy a new outfit or something.

Girl: That's why I love you, sweetie. You always know what I want to hear, and what I want to hear is the truth.

Grandma's Story: Black History

Amanda Barner

Characters:

Elderly Black lady (Grandma)
Three or four small African-American children
Black men and women: dressed as slaves, free men, soldiers, and modern-day people
White auctioneer
Several white farmers
Martin Luther King, Jr.
Medgar Evers

Scene: Old lady in rocking chair with several children at her feet.

First child: Grandma, tell us a story.

Grandma: Our story began a long time ago, when white men came to our motherland and captured some of our people. Our people were carried away in chains and put on boats to be transported to the New World and sold as slaves.

(To the side of the stage, slaves in boat with white master—singing: "Michael Row the Boat Ashore")

Grandma: When they arrived in America, they were carried to the auction block and sold to the highest bidder. They were poked and prodded, like cattle at a sale barn.
(To the side of the stage, two slaves (man and woman) on auction block—white man feels his muscles.)

Auctioneer: I have two prime specimens here. He is a healthy nigger with a strong back, and she is a strapping woman, good breeding stock. What can we start the bidding with?

Man in back: I'll bid \$50 for the pair.

Auctioneer: I have \$50. Can I get \$75?

Next man: I bid \$75.

Auctioneer: I have \$75. Can I hear \$100?

Next man: I'll give \$100.

Auctioneer: I have a bid of \$100. Are there any other bids?
\$100, going once, going twice, sold to the gentleman in
the brown shirt.

Grandma: Our people were sold like cattle to the highest bidder. Once purchased, they became pieces of property, like a cow or a horse. The master could do as he liked with them and still be within his legal rights. He could sell them, beat them, kill them; there would not be anything done about it, because they were his property. If the master said for them to be in the field at dawn, they had to be there. If he told them to stay all day, that's what they had to do. Sun up till sun down, that is how our people worked.

Slave with cotton sack: (*aside*) Massa says, I's gotta git a bale of cotton today. Massa says if I don't git it, well...

Grandma: If the slave didn't produce what the master expected of him, he was severely punished, which consisted of a beating with a rawhide whip on his bare back. Sometimes the beatings were so bad that the slave would faint from the pain and loss of blood. After many years, came the Civil War. The Northern people didn't want the Southern people to own slaves. Northerners wanted all people to be treated as human beings, not as possessions. Southerners wanted to do as they pleased. Why should they give up the source of their income just because someone else thought that it was wrong? Before the South lost the war, President Lincoln issued the "Emancipation Proclamation" declaring all slaves as free men.

Free Man: (*aside*) Mr. Lincoln says I's a free man. I got no money and no where to go, so how's I a free man?

Grandma: Freedom to many former slaves was only a pretty word. They had no money, owned no land, most could not read or write, so there was no choice for them but to continue doing the work that they knew how to do. The former slave masters now had to pay them, but it was barely enough to live on. Some migrated to the northern states, seeking a better life, but most were stuck because they could not do any better. In the 1930s came the

depression. There were no jobs to be had for anyone, White or Black. There was no money and very little food.

Woman: (aside) "DE-pression! What's a depression? Colored folks been pressed all the time so what's different now?"

Grandma: After the Depression, came World War II. Many of our boys went into the services and never came home again. Some came home maimed and crippled. Still others came home with a rage burning within them for the way they had been treated. They had stood up and fought for their country, but their country still thought of them as second-class citizens.

Soldier Boy: (aside; limping with his arm in a sling) They called us "Buffalo Soldiers." They treated us like buffaloes too, just like animals.

Grandma: In the late 1950's and early 1960's, Colored folks began to speak out against the injustices they had been dealt. We got tired of using the back door. We got tired of "Whites only" restrooms, water fountains, and restaurants. We got tired of passing up seats in the front of the bus, having to go all the way to the back. We got tired of being treated as if we were less than White folks were. Black leaders stood up and called for unity, for justice, and for equality.

MLK: (aside) Five score years ago, a great American signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity. But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed "We hold these truths to be self-evident. That all men are created equal. When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and every city. We will be able to speed up the day when all God's children, Black men and White men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands in the words of the old Negro spiritual, Free at last, free at last, thank God

Almighty, we are free at last!

(All characters return to stage and sing "We Shall Over come.")

Grandma: We marched in Washington, D.C. We marched in Selma, Alabama. We marched in Georgia and Mississippi. We demanded that we be treated as equals. Some of us were beaten, some were jailed, and some were even killed, trying to make America a better place for us all. In the late 1960's and early 1970's, "Separate but equal" was no longer good enough. Congress passed a law to integrate: schools, colleges, buses, stores, restaurants, no longer could we legally be denied our civil rights. Now we could go to the college of our choice, study any career we liked, be what we wanted to be.

Medger Evers: *(aside)* I dedicated my life to the racial integration of Mississippi. I taught Black Mississippians about the power of the ballot. I organized many economic boycotts. I attempted to break the color barrier at the University of Mississippi, but was rejected: Later, I helped James Meredith become the first Black person to enroll, I was appointed as the first field secretary of the NAACP in 1954. I wanted all public facilities and restaurants to be open to everyone, regardless of color."

Grandma: During the last twenty years or so, it seems that we have forgotten where we came from and how hard our forefathers struggled to get us to this point. We seem to have forgotten the price they paid to get our liberties. We are too comfortable in our material possessions, in our abilities. We have forgotten who was with us during our dark days, and who brought us into this marvelous light. For years the White man held us back, but now we are holding each other and ourselves down. We don't try to help each other succeed, but rather, we try to put ourselves up by stepping on our brothers. Let's all go up together. We have the legal right to choose whatever career we like, live where we want to live, drive the best car we can afford. Let us not give any of these accomplishments back. Let's use the power of the ballot to make needed changes. If we get too comfortable in one place, then we stop striving for improvement. Let us

move forward. Ever looking "to the hill from whence cometh our help." Let us take the high road to glory, rather than accepting the easy way. Let us always remember that it was by the grace of a loving God that we have been able to stand.

(All characters return to stage, everyone sings "We Have the Victory!")

Scholarship Award
Wesson Attendance Center

Short Story

Marilyn's Eyes (And a Greek Boy's Burden)

Adam Singletary

Marilyn Monroe didn't really know the power of her audacity and I would imagine that if Beethoven ever met you he would ask why you love him so much. What do you think you would say to persuade him to believe that you are only interested in his music and not his imaginative grace and his seductive smile?

No. As Marilyn Monroe eventually found out, I would also realize that the sensuality of human touch can only take you so far before dropping you on your face.

I stared at you for hours. You noticed I am sure but felt a bit uneasy with the set up of the situation and with your co-workers who apparently didn't respect you as much as I did. You wore the best parts of your personality on the outside that day and I imagine that that was what attracted me to you. This got me past the fact that you were so much older than I was and that you probably had experience where I had none.

I grew tired of beckoning your attention in the store, so I bought a cherry soda from you just to experience your presence. You smiled and clumsily opened my bottle for me (which was not in your job description I am sure). You handed it to me and my heart relocated to a warmer more needy place inside.

I left the store, not sure if I would ever see you again but knew that my tendency to stalk people would come through for me in this situation, and I would visit the store on a regular basis for a while trying to win you over.

A few days passed and some friends and I were shopping. One of them needed to smoke so I decided I would wait outside the store with her until she finished. In doing so I turned around and held the door open for you unknowingly. You smiled at me and I adored you.

Later on you shook my hand by the magazine rack and gave me your phone number and name and apologized if the act of doing so was inappropriate. I laughed, being internally glad that I was in control of the situation even though I knew

outwardly that I was the weaker participant in this duo game.

Riding home I dissected the possibilities of holding you close to me and falling in love with you. I fantasized about being everything you needed and surrendering all to what love had to offer the both of us.

We sat in the movie theater after our phone conversation. I was somewhat stiff and you were trying to converse to the best of your ability. You smelled of Christmas memories and liver or Florida memories and Tequila which stabilized your existence in my mind as you laughed at the movie dialogue and dropped your book between the chairs.

I followed close behind you in my car from the movie theater to the coffeehouse. I almost cried because of the way you turned your blinker on in inappropriate places along the highway only to assure my arrival at our destination. The people looked, perhaps intrigued but more likely angered, at our arrival and I knew that my assumption of other people's unimportance was true and that as long as I had love no one else mattered.

You pointed out a huge statue of Beethoven and claimed that you would give anything to own it and I said I understood because I would do the same for a statue of Tori. You smiled and asked of my favorite poet. I made a joke that you didn't get but didn't feel stupid. The coffeehouse closed and we left. Heading for our separate houses. Your house a few minutes away and mine almost an hour.

A few days passed and you invited me to your house. We sat on your couch and desperately grasped for things to say. I had trouble holding the conversation because I do not know you well enough to get theoretical and not feel judged by you, but also I cannot settle for just small talk, so I sit and listen to either you or the silence.

On into the night we drive around Jackson and find a small park. We walk to two swings and I sit in the one to your right facing forward. You straddle your swing and face me. You tell me of your conversation about me with your mother and you question how I feel about you being six years older than me. I say it's not a big deal and return the question to you. You say that I am so much more mature than most guys my age and I smile.

You comment on my facial features and tell me how you

described me to all your friends as resembling the Greek god of beauty. I feel happy for a minute, but then feel as if a standard has been set in which I will have to live up to every time I see you. I am amazed at your attraction to me and try to contemplate whether or not you are lying.

I say that I think people and humanity are at their worst when they are trying to defend their beliefs, simply because most people do not know how to debate their beliefs proficiently. People get too angry and too personally involved. They preset their mind frame until nothing persuades them otherwise. For example, they limit what is beautiful even though beauty cannot be caged. People always choose sides and always draw lines. I say that I desperately believe the world would be a better place if we all allowed one another to follow our own personal beliefs without questioning others.

You have no time to respond because a guy in a jacket walks from the street toward us. We are sitting about one hundred yards from the road surrounded by trees and overgrowth. You say you don't feel good about the situation and that we should go. The man gets a few feet in front of us and stops and stares. I feel sure that he is going to kill us, but then we start walking and make it to your car. My hands are chilled and I watch you silently as you drive us back to your house.

Your roommate is insanely rude and I try to ignore him as we pass back to your room. On your couch, once again, you ask to hold my hand and I give you permission. I notice for the first time how beautiful your hands are and I love you for this. I stare in awe at how this simple sight has literally taken my breath away.

You utter something and push my hands away. You apologize for trying to seduce me and I don't mind at all because your hands are so beautiful. Then my mind floats to the sexual tension in the room. For the first time in my life I realized that my emotional problems go beyond simple trust issues and penetrate right down to the sexuality. I let out a heavy sigh of fear as I realize the depth of this problem. I think it must be the fear of someone who has been raped in the past and is placed in the same situation. I pretend that it is only momentary and realize in the back of my mind that some psychiatrist will one day make a lot of money off me.

We go to the restaurant where you work and we eat. I feel fiercely self-conscious because I foolishly wore a shirt that was made to be tight. The conversation is somewhat better but its flawed nature leaves me a tiny bit depressed.

Back at your house I ask if you have ever been in love and you tell me of the one time you were and how you moved to England with this guy which was a mistake, and later you tell me of how you grew to dislike him.

You comment on how you like the way I stare off into the distance of the room even though I am aware that you are staring at me. You call me beautiful and I feel happy and pathetic and paradoxically ugly. I wonder if perhaps you are only interested in my physical appearance and this saddens me.

I tell you my theory on nudity and how I believe everyone should walk around with no clothes on, simply because clothes are binding and unneeded. You say if that happened you would have to start going to the gym. I say I believe the opposite would happen, that everyone would realize that huge amounts of the majority have horrible bodies and everyone would develop a better self-image. You say that you do not think many people would agree with me and resume your stare.

I leave your house never to see you again. We made plans and you never called. I tried calling myself for a few days. One Sunday you answered and I was surprised. Usually your rude roommate answers and lies about your whereabouts. You talk for a while as if nothing is wrong and I go along with your deception only because I realize how much I actually do like you and hope for a good outcome.

Finally you say you have to go and I ask if you are tired of "us." You tell me that you respect me greatly for asking and that you couldn't find the courage to being the subject up. You tell me how great a person I am, but you say you feel guilty doing things with me because of our age difference. I believe you without doubt for the first time because of the sincerity in your voice.

I find myself on a different level now than the majority. The majority abuses love and walks away from love without a second thought. Marilyn Monroe got tired of the constant sexuality I am sure even though the majority loved her for her provocative nature. Marilyn killed herself and Beethoven died and you no longer know who I am.

An Autumn Without Trees

Daniel Holloway

There is nothing quite like the feeling of childhood, innocent kisses, and the first day of fall. Childhood has weeks of tree swinging, undeniable best friends, and naturally, there is the advantage of endless time. And of course innocent kisses need no explanation.

But, fall must be the greatest, for it encompasses all the others. There is no memory, or dream for that matter, that cannot be improved by the addition of autumn's first phantom, cold winds sweeping over the pines, sending bugs and well-tanned summer worshippers back into their catacombs.

Nothing bad can come about in fall.

I had just spent the last hour and a half sitting on the third floor of Dawson Hall watching the last stands of summer flowers bend in the breeze and reading "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock." It was one of those introspective moments; the kind that only poets and saints can really understand . . . although I'm pretty sure that saints worry about nothing and poet's only worry about themselves.

Poets seem like a selfish race of people.

Maybe I'll be a poet some day.

But I was talking about fall. Long sleeves and colored leaves (leaves aren't complete until they are multi-colored), the shortening of days, and the way that laughs seem to come out easier when they're free from humidity's claws. These are all reasons why fall is my favorite season. The wind unselfishly carries the smell of hard woods being desperately lit in too long dormant fireplaces; making me think of 'old times', when Mom used to ask me and my older brother to stack the firewood as close to the front door as we could. She always hated to walk all the way to the shed in that frigid weather for a stick of oak.

That's another thing; fall is inseparable from trees. If there were no trees I think we'd just have to write autumn off as a useless season. The politicians would probably try to vote it out, or ask if they could just stick it in on leap years. What a waste that would be. We'd miss the long looks from blonde girls, which

are always more beautiful in the autumn, driving with the windows down, and what about Halloween. Also, I don't think anyone's ready to give up sweaters yet. You know, I'm willing to bet my grade in American Lit. that if it weren't for fall there would be no love in the world.

Fall makes you think, too.

That's what I was doing from the upper balconies of my quiet college: thinking. Thinking about why I'm still here, what's happening with my life, and why am I taking biology. You know, the usual stuff.

I've got biology next . . . and I dread it. Dr. Myers is an atheist or something. As if my life, and the lives of my fellow students are not depressing enough, we get to sit for over an hour and listen to him tell us how our bodies are just two dollars and nineteen cents worth of chemicals, and that we're an accident of evolution! Then they'll ask why young people have such a high suicide rate.

Sometimes I think that schooling steals things out of your soul and transforms them into something for your brain. That's why I'm an English major. How can one become complacent or bitter surrounded daily by Wordsworth, Byron, and Eliot. . . I bet Eliot loved fall too.

I kept repeating, as I watched the robins hop across the grassy land below me:

*Would it have been worth while
If one, setting a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."*

I've committed myself to learning the whole thing, and this is as far as I've gotten. I know, I know. It's kind of robust for a nineteen year old to memorize poetry, especially one as complex as Prufrock, but adults always say that we're just sponges, absorbing whatever is pushed onto us. Why not make it something cultural?

The sad part is that I don't know if I believe Eliot anymore. Don't know if I ever did. *Do I dare disturb the universe?* Sorry J. Alfred, you're asking the wrong guy. Sometimes I think it's the selfishness in me, but the truth is I just don't care. I honestly cannot think of one thing worth fighting for.

I guess . . . I guess I'm kind of an autumn without trees.

The chapel bells rang the hour, and before I can think my legs were churning down the steps. I've got to make it to room 201 before the twelfth ring. Dr. Myers is a stickler for being on time. That, and being quiet, and taking neat notes, and making as close to perfect as possible, and keeping your work area neat. But probably most especially about staying in your assigned seats. And wouldn't you know, I'm stuck in a chair isolated from anyone I even remotely know, and I'm not about to try and make new friends. It's a useless, hollow way to spend your time.

I plop down in my plastic seat, accentuated with a lovely number 22, just as the last bell echoes through the greasy tan walls of the science room. Dr. Myers looked at me, then puts away his pen, disappointed.

"Now that we're all here," he starts, and the class moves into their hunker down positions. It's a gift you develop around the tenth grade, the fine art of sleeping, or daydreaming in my case, while giving the appearance of interest.

Dr. Myers has a large sweat stain under his right arm, a clear sign that he's stressing today. And we all know what happens when he's stressed . . . we're not going to be taught, we're going to be preached to. Cory always says that it's like Billy Graham and Einstein had an illegitimate child.

Cory plays soccer, and just last week he came back to the dorms drunk on gin and vodka. He told the R.A. to mind his own business when he asked about all the staggering in the hall. I don't think Cory's afraid of anything . . . except maybe the future.

Dr. Myers raises his left arm, "Let's start with a simple definition of evolution . . ."

I drown him out, just like the rest of the class does, before he puts the first period on the first sentence. Sometimes I draw little stick men in the folds of my workbook. Once there was a cute one of three tribal sticks attacking a stick tiger. I like that one a lot, but come to think of it, it may have been on my Algebra I book.

Sometimes I write a poem, and then pretend that I'm giving it to Mr. T.S. Eliot himself. And then I lie back, place my palms behind my dark hair and listen to his flowing praises.

Usually I can't remember what he says, but the word brilliant is one of his favorites. I *always* remember that.

However, here in the last three weeks, I've been spending a considerable amount of time studying the young lady in front of me. I think her name is Sarah, or maybe Sandra, but there's an 'S' at the beginning, that I'm sure of. Anyway, whatever her name is, she's beautiful. Not beautiful like Ms. America, but something else. Some kind of deep hidden beauty. Her auburn hair is cut short, just long enough to be pushed behind her ears, from where it sometimes breaks free and tries to escape to her face, but she always gently pushes it back, never becoming angry or upset with it. She treats her hair like a delicate puppy. It's sad to say, but I really don't know if I'd even recognize her from the front.

Dr. Myers just slammed his book down. He's getting irate because no one will answer his questions. He doesn't want us to just sit there, he wants us to participate.

I'm staring at Sarah, or Sandra, or whatever her name is, trying to take in as much of her as I can in the short amount of time we're going to share. She's wearing a ribbed, gray tube top today, showing off her tanned shoulders. She's obviously been into the sun a lot, because her back is covered with a crisscross of small brown freckles, like some strange human connect the dots. But even malevolent skin cells cannot hide the fact that before me are the softest most inviting shoulders I have ever seen. She's busy scribbling notes, and all I'm thinking of is her, wrapped in Prufrock's shawl; imagining her throwing it off. God she is beautiful!

She suddenly sits up quite straight in her seat, almost as if she could feel my eyes on her long, dark neck, and there was a moment when I was certain, as sure as I am that the oceans contain water, that she was going to turn around. She was going to turn around and smile, or curse, at me for ever thinking that we could connect on any level. But when I noticed the large, black-headed body of Dr. Myers rumbling toward us it became clear just what had happened, and what had scared her.

"Can you please answer that question, Sarah," he thundered, and as she flinched back I saw that she was not taking notes, but drawing small, smooth hearts with initials in them.

Her voice was soft (as I had suspected) but forceful, all in

the same breathe. "What was the question?" she asked sliding her hand over her scribbled notebook.

"Pay attention," the doctor roared! He was enraged almost. I found out later that his wife had demanded a divorce some six hours before our class. "Do you believe all this that I am saying? Evolution?"

There was a collective breath drawn in by the class. Evolution had been an easy enough lesson all through high school, until someone brought religion into it. It was like priming a volcano to mention any kind of ethics in a science class.

Dr. Myers placed two sweaty palms onto Sarah's desk. It was streaming from his eyes like physical words: *I'm going to make an example of you!*

"Do you believe evolution?" he coldly asked, no more than three feet from her face.

She remained calm as she looked up at him. I'm sure she was looking into his eyes, but I can't be sure.

"Yes sir, I do," she said clearly.

Dr. Myers drew back a little. I could see two moist hand-prints on the edge of Sarah's desk. "Well, you're a fucking idiot," he said in a condescending tone. Then he launched into how science couldn't prove the soul, but humans could feel it. If you couldn't something was wrong with you.

He spoke for six minutes, often pointing at her and calling her things like, "the unemotional," or "fact ridden ice queen." He called her a bitch twice, I counted.

All this time Sarah had begun to slump down into her chair. I heard her pull in unusual breaths of air, and saw her chest heave in spasm-like jerks a few time. She was on the verge of tears.

I was a fraction of a second from reaching out and touching her bare shoulder, when Dr. Myers thudded into his chair and made one final slash at the young girl.

"May someone somewhere have pity on you! Page 326."

Sarah was crying now. Her tears, uninhibited, were sliding down her face. They seemed almost alive twisting and snaking past her cheekbones. She must have been so embarrassed.

The next moment she was standing, back pack on one lovely shoulder and a hand, adorned with only one silver ring,

covering her weeping face.

"Where are you going missy," snapped Dr. Myers as she passed his giant desk.

Sarah stood in the open doorway, rays of sunlight bouncing off her tear streaked face. It occurred to me that she was indeed quite beautiful from the front as well. She opened her mouth as if to say something, but her lower lip only quivered a little before she turned and disappeared into the waiting outside.

Dr. Myers grunted before turning back to us, the same stern look on his inhuman face.

"Page 326!"

I can't explain to you how or why everything happened the way it did afterwards. I sometimes imagine that it was Eliot. In my mind he was sitting next to me, his neatly ironed charcoal suit draped over his frame. He looked a lot older than the twenty-three-year-old who had written *Prufrock* all those many years before. He looked worn down by returning dreams and alcohol. But his voice was sweet, not that much unlike Sarah's, as he leaned close to my ear, so close I could almost feel his aged lips against my earlobe. There was a smile in his voice when he spoke.

"Do I dare disturb the universe?"

Dr. Myers' head shot up at the first sound of the tearing paper. His eyes narrowed as I lifted page 326 above my head, its lacerated edges jutting out like teeth.

His mouth opened, but I was up before his words could take their first breathe. There was a strange sound in my ears as I rose from my plastic chair and made my way toward the door.

I placed the torn page on the front of the good doctor's desk as I passed. He only stared at me.

As the door began to creak shut behind me I heard him say something to the rest of the class. It could have been, "anyone else?"

The breeze was blowing easily, gently touching my ears, as I scanned the land for any sign of Sarah. There was a dark-haired girl headed toward the women's dormitories, but she had a maroon backpack, and Sarah's is brown.

Brown. Just like the leaves of the trees that were looking down on me. Nodding or shaking their leafed heads I'm not

sure, but the point is they were there.

I stood more still than I had in years, Dawson Hall rising darkly behind me, and thought about how beautiful Sarah had been, standing in that nasty doorway. How innocent her shaking lip had been. How she awoke something in me that even T.S. Eliot had failed to stir.

My hair flapped a little in the breeze.

"That is not what I meant, at all," I said to the swaying trees.

"That is not it at all."

Then the wind rattled the auburn husks that had collected along the sidewalk's edge, reminding me that it is my favorite season.

Shakespeare loved winter, but Eliot and I are children of the fall.

JOSIP

Halley Murray

The boy moved slowly, lowering his feet so that the toe did not touch before the arch of his foot or the heel. He placed the length of his foot onto the walk at once to evenly distribute the pain. He considered stopping again to get off his feet and to escape the burning. But he moved on slowly down Decatur towards Royal. His cotton socks had rubbed his feet until the skin wore away or turned into blisters that finally ruptured and bled.

In a doorway of a store he sat down with his back to the wall. He pulled his knees up in front of him, watched the rain, and considered removing his socks, but the thought of pulling them back on changed his mind.

He tried to stay watchful and awake. The sight of the guard from the institute had filled him with fear of being caught and returned there, and although he was often confused, the one thing he knew to do was to avoid the guards. He could not return there. He had not wanted the medication or the tests and so when the time was right he had simply walked out. But he did not understand any of the world outside. He had no money and no knowledge of society. He leaned his head over onto his knees and his hair fell forward hiding his face from the street lights. In a few minutes he pushed himself up, ignoring the hunger pangs in his stomach, and moved down the street. The boy stopped at a small clothing store and peered in. Socks lay casually across the expensive running shoes in the window. He cupped his dark thin fingers around his face, leaned forward, and peered past the window display tables to a long counter with a cash register and a darkened door past that.

Harris had slept as well as he ever did on the old sagging double bed in the darkened room behind the shop. The rain had lulled his aching body and for a while had relieved his insomnia. In his sleep he saw no rice fields and heard no chut-chut-chut of a helicopter's blades or the sharp rattle of an M-16. He sat up on the side of the bed and rubbed his hands over his face, feeling the stubble on his cheeks. The green face of a little clock said 2:30. He stood up and started toward the small

bathroom and he heard a sound in the shop. It was a small sound like cloth brushing against some surface, a whisper. He moved forward staying close to the wall until he was near the door.

The boy had his back turned to Harris and was stuffing something into the pockets of his coat. Harris moved toward the boy walking on the balls of his feet. He was so close that he could smell the kid's wet hair when he reached out, caught him in a choke hold and pulled the kid off balance, backwards. The boy tensed in surprise, his body hard and strong, but very thin. Both toppled to the floor and the boy twisted out of his grasp, swinging his elbows. One blow caught Harris on the temple, glanced off and smashed the side of his nose. Lights exploded in his head and the darkness of the jungle rushed in around him. When the flashback ended the boy under him had gone limp and blood was running from his nose into his hair. Harris saw bruises already forming on his high cheekbone. Harris stood and pulled the boy up with him. Breathing hard Harris reached for the lamp and the telephone. The boy stared at Harris with brown almond shaped eyes beneath heavy brows.

"Who are you?" Harris asked. The kid did not move, but he lowered his head. Harris had the distinct feeling that he had seen the boy before. "Look at me! I said, who are you?" Harris asked again. "Where did you come from?"

"Let me go. I won't come back again," the boy said.

"Damned right you won't!" Harris screamed as he picked up the receiver of the phone.

"Please! Please don't call them..."

"Then start talking..."

"I don't know... I..."

Harris dialed the 9.

"I don't know! Please ! Let me explain," the boy begged.

Harris replaced the receiver, reached into the pockets of the kid's coat and pulled out the loot. Two pairs of socks and two candy bars.

"Socks? You stole socks?" Harris mumbled. "You're going to jail over a pair of socks and a chocolate bar?"

"My feet... sore... I can't walk anymore. I needed them. Please let me go. I won't come back again. I've never done this

before."

Harris suddenly knew where he had seen the boy. His own face. This kid was him, 30 years ago. The realization made him stagger back a step. His head pounded as he fought to control his panic. The flashbacks were bad, but until now they were about Viet Nam, not about himself as a kid. And never this crazy.

"Take off your shoes and socks." The boy sat down and stripped of his shoes and socks and when he looked at Harris his lips were pressed tightly together, his face gray and his eyes dark with pain and shame.

He sank back into his chair across from the boy. He put his hands into his lap trying to stop shaking.

"Take care of you feet and you might make it," his sergeant had said. "Get them wet, keep them wet and you'll get an infection, a parasite, and you'll lose a leg quicker than if you stepped on a mine. Change your socks and keep 'em dry dammit!"

"In there," Harris said pointing toward the bedroom. He walked behind the boy as he hobbled. Harris handed him a towel and watched as he dried his feet. Harris squeezed a glob of anti-bacterial ointment onto the boy's hand and watched as he rubbed it into the broken skin. Harris ripped the tag from the socks and the boy pulled them on.

"Tell me who you are and where you came from," Harris said.

The boy's face was tense and his eyes were on Harris' face.

"I don't know where I am from. I grew up in a place near here. There they called me Josip. I have no other name. . . I don't remember much. Just being here . . . in that place . . . the old men sitting around."

"What about your parents?"

The boy shook his head.

"I don't know... I don't remember them. I remember the home. . . there were others there. . . like me... I was not alone. I don't know. I had to do a lot of mathematics. Lots of numbers and formulas."

"Where was this place?"

"Here, at least close to here. I have been walking for

days. I got lost and don't know how it all works," the boy said. He didn't look at Harris as he spoke.

"How what works?"

"Anything. I mean . . . where to go or how to get money or food. They fed us there and gave us clothes. I never learned about how it is out here."

After the kid had changed into dry clothing and lay on a small cot, Harris lit a cigarette and watched him. He had been only a bit older when he was drafted and they made him into a killing machine. He had not asked questions, but had obeyed mindlessly. Once, before the marijuana had burned his brain and the acid seared his psyche; before war and the sickness of what he did claimed him, he had been as innocent as this child. Long before the days he had spent in Clark Veterans' Hospital mental ward, where the ringing of a bell signaled the white blaze of electricity sent to adjust his brain, he had been as young. Once he, Chuck, and Carlos had roamed the French Quarter, drunk \$.25 pitchers of beer, smoked Marlboros, watched strippers and drag queens, and planned their futures.

Although they all came back alive the plan changed. He went to work in his father's shop as he pushed away the dreams of becoming an artist, Carlos to direct Clark Veterans' Hospital, and Chuck to his drinking.

Once when he was separated from his company for seven weeks in the jungles, Harris had eaten rodents, worms, and grasshoppers to survive. The jungle seemed to be the same no matter which way he turned. He was delirious, his teeth chattering, and his joints inflamed with fluid when the point men from his company found him. He fought them, seeing the enemy, until Carlos got there. He wrapped his arms around him, pulled Harris to the ground, and held him against his chest. Finally he recognized his old friend and began to sob. Carlos held him and with his rough dirty fingers he wiped the tears from Harris's cheeks.

"Oh, baby, don't cry, Please don't cry," Carlos had said.

Who was this little lost thief? Maybe just another homeless runaway with a new line of bull? Harris pulled open the night stand and took out the shoe box of pictures. He dug through them until he found the old ones. Carlos, Chuck and himself standing in a park on their senior trip. Sunshine re-

flected off the shiny ride behind them catching the roller coaster, the burst of rose-colored flowers behind them in a raised bed. Harris saw his own lips and his straight nose and his long hippie hair parted in the middle. He looked at the sleeping boy. This kid was him. But how? Was it him in another dimension, still trying to find the lost years; some counterpart of him wandering about, lost and confused? Was he being given a second chance somehow?

A chance to get it right this time, to forget the drunken nights, the fever and pain in his joints; the sight of Chuck lying in his own vomit in the alley behind the Torpedo Club? Harris wanted to feel the strength in this boy's young body, the taut muscles, the clear eyes. He wanted to be as he was then before his hair thinned, his stomach and thighs grew flabby and soft, and he lost his ability to care about anyone. He wanted to stretch out on top of the boy and feel his youth dissolve into him. He wanted his choices back.

They had taken samples of him at Clark; blood, tissue, urine. Needle after needle full. Carlos had laughed about it later, telling him he was such a hunk they wanted to preserve him for all time.

That was long before anyone heard of cloning. But a cloned child had to grow up, didn't he? He had been 23 or 24. Could they have kept his DNA? Had they cloned this kid from him? He glanced back at the picture. Harris rubbed his face. The dementia the doctors talked about must be getting worse. But this kid could be his own son if his marriage had worked out and things had been different. He always told himself that it did not matter. But as he lay there in the darkness, with hot tears in his eyes, and a burning in his chest Harris admitted that it mattered to him that no one cared about him. That no one would care when he died in his lumpy bed; that his neighbors would watch them remove his body.

"Poor ole Harris," they'd say. "Never was right after he came back from Viet Nam." But not one of them would give a damn.

At dawn Harris put cereal and milk on the table, reassured the confused boy that he was safe and told him to stay put. Would the boy leave while he was gone? Harris doubted it and if he did he'd just forget about the kid and the thoughts and

feelings.

"The government cloned him from me, didn't they, Carlos? I was crazy, drugged, and you people took what you needed, stored it or froze it and then later you cloned him. You thought that I was so screwed up I'd never know."

Harris was sitting in the leather chair facing his friend across the expanse of walnut. Carlos' face was neutral.

"Where is he, Harris? He is property of the government. He's dangerous, and we have been searching for that boy for weeks."

"How the hell is he dangerous? He's a kid with sore feet and no idea of how to survive. You used him for your experiments and your tests. You never intended for him to function in the world or to last so long or to escape. And you damn sure didn't get my permission to use me and my body in this!"

"He's a clone. He grew up in a lab. There were seven of them. All male; all his age. Beautiful kids, but not exactly intended to become citizens. They were made to teach us more about cloning. Then they escaped from here. Four of them died, either by accident, homicide, or illness. Two we recovered. One died here and the other is insane, simply a useless vegetable. We don't know what happened. The whole thing went wrong from the start. Josip is the only boy still missing. You have got to return him. We have to protect him."

"What will happen to him when you find him?"

Carlos rose from his chair and stared out the window.

"We will deal with him. I'm not the absolute boss here. I couldn't watch them experiment on him. He was. . . you! When we were kids . . . it was like looking at you, except he had no background. These boys were cloned at age 15, not as infants. That was a first and a mistake. They were plunged into adolescents with no childhood, no background, no stability, nothing. . . and it failed," Carlos told him.

"You will kill him, won't you? He will be disposed of and the experiment written off as a failure."

"Harris, he is a clone."

"He came to me with bleeding feet and he stole socks and candy. He is like looking at myself years ago. Just a clone? He's alive, Carlos! He thinks, breathes, and he feels. He feels!"

Harris sat back abruptly, suddenly very tired. The ache

in his head increased into a roaring pounding. He pressed his fingertips into his eyes.

"Harris, what do you want?" Carlos asked. His voice was not unkind.

"Suppose your group never found him? Suppose he just disappeared and never turned up? Give him to me, Carlos. I'll leave the area, sell the shop. He is a part of me . . . not a son . . . yet a part. I could teach him things. Let me take him with me . . . leave the South," Harris urged.

"This office is very persistent. They want him at all cost. But I suppose it could be worked out. Give me a little time," Carlos said.

Harris nodded, stood up and held out his hand. His friend Carlos shook it.

Josip never saw the hand that injected him. The drug acted so quickly that his eyes closed before the image in his pupils reached his brain. The three men stripped him and loaded his limp naked body into the van parked at the back of the shop. They collected his old clothing, straightened the bed, and put the cot away. They washed the cereal bowl and spoon. Within ten minutes there was not a sign that the boy had ever been there.

Harris did not dislike being back at Clark. He enjoyed the walks around the small pond behind the buildings. His head did not hurt so much anymore. Carlos told him that the stroke had been a light one, that he would recover, and perhaps he could return home someday. He had given up trying to remember the events before the stroke. Besides Carlos said the flashbacks, headaches, and delusions were the forerunners of the stroke, and he wanted to avoid another one. Sometimes he had a vague sense of anger and loss and perhaps fear, and sometimes he thought of himself as a boy again. He dreamed of a face much like his own, but shy and innocent. Who owned that face? It made his head ache and he tried not to think of it often.

Josip sat with the others on benches in the hallway, dressed in loose green trousers and a hospital gown. His long hair was matted and uncombed, his face pale, his eyes dull. A bit of saliva collected in the corner of his mouth. His eyes followed the man as he walked passed him, but his head did not move. The man went out the end doors with an attendant. The

boy looked down to his bare feet, extended out in front of him, sticking out of the green bottoms of his baggy pants. Then he lowered his eyes back to his hands in his lap. A male nurse took his arm.

“Come on, son. It’s time for your meds.”

The boy stood and shuffled along with the man to his room, one hand clutching the beltless pants to keep them on his bony hips. He swallowed the pills and lay down on his bed. When his eyes grew heavy he turned over onto his side and pulled his knees up and as his breath evened out into sleep he whispered the only word that stirred any memory. It was the only word that he ever spoke.

“Harris,” he said.

Scholarship Award
Wesson Attendance Center

Poetry

Grazing Locomotives

Terry Johnson

Huge upon the hazy plains
Where bloom momentary trees
Where blows immensely round their knees
The grass that fades to air again

Slow and solemn in the night
Beneath the slender pole
That lifts above their reach each soul
Enormous soldier of the night

Still sweating from the deep ravines
Where not within the buried wood
The bones of time and where they stood
Graze the great machines

Absence

Terry Johnson

Lamplight lies in a ring,
Of dead moths, the bed fills
With broken wishbones

Oh my lifegiver, the radiator stands
Frozen in stony silence
The sofa drains in a pool of red
The ashtrays spill their ashes
Beer cans loiter in corners

You could come back and touch this all to life
The wings of the chairs flutter as you go by

The hands of the clock are chained
By your absence, the hours chopped
Like logs and dumped on my doorstep
Love, the door is open

The Metal Mosquito

Ella Kuhn

I carry the disease of addiction.
Waiting for the moment we can be alone together,
I am your personal cheerleader.
No one thing can make you feel as alive as I do.

I carry the disease of habit.
How many times a day do you think of me?
The familiar sting of my penetration is comforting and
Alleviating.

I carry the disease of leisure.
I'm a good friend: amusing, entertaining, diverting.
I'm the hobby that makes the rest of your pastimes
Worthwhile.

I carry the disease of alienation.
You are different because of me.
How many people know about us?
Must you keep our relationship a secret for your sake?

I carry the disease of destruction.
Tearing holes has become a painless experience.
The piercing burn during our intimate embrace is a
Friendly face in your day of dark despair.

What would you do without me?
And my swarm before me...after me?

I Broke My Mother's Coffee Cup

Ella Kuhn

It was World War II and I wasn't yet born, but Paw Paw was in Hawaii when he saw the bombs. Dropping from the air, they called it Pearl Harbor.

When he came home to see my momma, she was a little girl, he brought home a shaving mug that survived war, overseas travel, and three children of his own.

The mug was short and white and it had fat rounded lips. Momma says she liked drinking from it because it cooled coffee more quickly. And because it was her daddy's.

I never got to know him, but Momma and I were good friends. And she would let me drink from her daddy's coffee cup while she told me the story of the bombs.

We were sitting on my front porch, with unforgiving brick floors.

And it fell...

Shattered into a million pieces of my Paw Paw's dreams, my momma's love for the things he left behind.

I broke my momma's coffee cup.

Sand-gold in my Hair

Adam Singletary

Would you actually dare welcome
A faltered scarlet
Known for her provocative nature
If she could care and smile and decay?

I know you
I have known you all along
Hide in between the layers
Open the door to the cabin and I
Will crawl forever
Toward the breathing of momentary
Wind falling silent
As I walk across your horizon
Blue Green Red light pretending
That I know where your center is.

I know you so very well
We were lovers when the Indians gave in
When the clock struck for hanging witches
Dying for our sin

Follow me into my flower, blooming, holding us there
You're going to change my name
Brides and bullets and southern belles
I await your carriage to carry me away
The bridge has been gold plated
The road a dusty film of sawdust grass
I will reach through to you on the other side
Where anger hides and hate dies
And love is not fragments of overactive imaginations.

Embracing the Elephant Man

Heather Christian

He never wore his shoes
Right
They always
Clobbered over
Sideways
Shuffled on tile over our
8:00
Algebra Class Floors
Nobody
Understood a word he said
We just smiled and nodded
Cordially
Went back to our ponytails and pony rides and pencil shavings

One Christmas
I gave him a box of cookies my mother
Made—
Had forced me to bring to
him—afro-ed and clob-shoed
So
I threw tantrums
Greedily
Washed my hands of December
Dust
Left from the hand shake I
Offered
In place of his embrace

He
Was black as the tar
Baby
With porcelain smile
Smelled
Of Pine-Sol

Said my name in some primitive tongue
And made me think him
Story-book
A Strange
Stupid
Creature that knew nothing of our
Half-hearted
Mimicry and didn't notice
The way I avoided his strange
Good morning
Touch amid a backpack laden hall

They fired him
When the school and its budget
Found a more efficient
Human
To wind the clocks

Two days
Ago I hear him
Walking
Clobbering across asphalt
I looked at my hands as if his
Residue
Were there
And thought myself 12 years old
Lost in a gracious embrace
I could not
Refuse

Point O One

Heather Christian

It is the novel thing to do
To sit by a mast already christened

And write about the day
And its boats and Baptism

Poetry comes easily when
Moments are already compacted full of it

And today is its own decimal incantation
1.3 knots, 6.7 feet

And falling.

White

Heather Christian

Sailing
on a
still day

is like

Listening
to Bach
in a
new snow

metered
metric
and spotlessly
numb

Scholarship Award
Cathedral High School

Formal Essay

The Relentless Pursuit of Perfection

Daniel Holloway

In her 1996 release, "Perfect," Alanis Morissette croons; *"Don't forget to win first place."*

Her haunting song paints a vivid, socially horrifying, and all too familiar picture of the way a child is raised. This simple line (basically saying 'oh, by the way, don't forget to be perfect') shows us how perfection-oriented present society is.

Pressures are placed on individuals starting at a young age... often before one can fully bear them. It was reported in a newspaper some time ago that a young man committed suicide because he felt his parents would be disappointed with his latest report card on which he had a B.

However, this drive for all to be pleasing is not a new obsession. It has existed since time began.

When Eve ate the fruit in the Garden of Eden, what did the serpent say?

"And the serpent said to the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be like God" (Genesis 3: 4)

Man already existed as a perfect being. However, the drive to become the epitome caused his downfall.

At the turn of the century, the mighty Roman Empire took a strong grip on the many lands that surrounded it, trying to create the perfect nation. The payoff for this world-changing task was an increase in political assassinations, millions of dying soldiers, and an ever-growing thirst for blood among the citizens whom demanded new, more violent public deaths in the amphitheaters.

Perfection came again in an evil form in the 1930's and 1940's as Adolf Hitler had millions of people of Jewish blood killed in a thwarted attempt to create his perfect race.

Perfection can be, and is, a deadly master. Perhaps no other author showed the downfall of the perfectionist more eloquently than the early American author Nathaniel Hawthorne did. In his short story "The Birthmark" we find this ideal clearly developed.

Alymer, a scientist of some reputation, becomes obsessed with a small, hand-like birthmark which sits on the face of his beautiful wife Georgiana.

Alymer, in a need for perfection not too far removed from that of Adam and Eve, tells his radiant, new bride early in the marriage that the birthmark 'shocks him.'

"No, dearest Georgiana, you came so nearly perfect from the hand of Nature that this slightest possible defect, which we hesitate whether, to term a defect or a beauty, shocks me, as being the visible mark of earthly perfection." (Hawthorne 632)

Because of his drive for perfection, Alymer takes it upon himself to make that which surrounds him perfect.

"Dearest Georgiana, I have spent much thought upon the subject . . . I am convinced of the perfect practicality of its removal." (Hawthorne 634)

Alymer makes it his life's goal to remove the small blot from his wife's face. In fact, it soon turns from a thing he would like to do, into a full-blown obsession. An obsession to which even the perfectly contented Georgiana eventually gives in.

In the end Alymer is triumphant in his endeavors to remove the unsightly mark.

"Poor? Nay richest, happiest, most favored!" exclaimed he. "My peerless bride, it is successful! You are perfect!" (Hawthorne 641)

An old proverb tells us that into every life a little rain must fall. Robert Frost, the American poet, takes it one step further and tells us that "nothing gold can stay" (Frost 49). In 1998 the alternative music group Fuel echoed Frost's proclamation by saying "all that shimmers in this world is sure to fade." Whoever

has said it, or how they said it, is unimportant. The fact is that on a heart level mankind knows that perfection cannot be achieved on this earth. The Greeks believed that perfection was of the gods, and the gods were not men, therefore perfection could never be grasped on earth.

Perhaps Alymer believed he had finally grasped that illusive, abstract principle. Maybe for a few moments he felt he had a chain wrapped tightly around the neck of the same beast that drove Jay Gatsby about in a mad rush to make himself worthy of Daisy, or that stealthily convinced good-natured Dr. Jeckyl to concoct his transformative elixir.

However, no sooner does the birthmark fade than Georgiana begins to die in Alymer's arms. He now holds a perfect corpse.

In an ending reminiscent of F. Scott Fitzgerald's much later work, The Great Gatsby, Hawthorne, as the interruptive narrator, tells us:

"The momentary circumstance was too strong for him; he failed to look beyond the shadowy scope of time, and, living once for all in eternity, to find the perfect future in the present.
(Hawthorne 642)"

At the last minute, Hawthorne informs us of the foolishness and self-destructive tendency to make the present as perfect as possible.

Edgar Allen Poe, one of the first American Romanticists and a contemporary of Hawthorne's, believed that the pursuit of perfection is what led the artist to paint, the composer to birth music, and the writer to create words. He believed that one could never feel that a work of one's own mind was "finished" (Perkins 601).

In "The Birthmark," is Hawthorne telling a moral to all who read and are open enough to listen, or is he himself merely a victim of the same need and drive for perfection that he warned others of?

The truth is, and one is sad to admit, that perfection is indeed unattainable.

Ben Franklin created a list of things for himself to do in order to become a better person. By Franklin's own admission,

he did not achieve perfection. Scientists have attempted for decades to achieve the perfect temperature, absolute zero. Those in the science field all across this planet freely admit that absolute zero cannot be reached.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb saying, "Perfection is something we all strive for, but never achieve." Perhaps it is best that way. The human race is not ready for perfection. The people on this green earth have been graced with beauties beyond belief, whether they are physical, intellectual, spiritual, or emotional. Instead of taking these things with a grateful smile and a humble heart, men and women rush out day after day in search of a larger home, a faster car, or any other object or feeling that gives them the illusion of working toward perfection.

It is a race: perfection. Alymer possibly discovered this upon placing a beautiful, lifeless body into the ground. We rush about to achieve that utopian state, that is never (never was probably) there.

Perfection: An endless pursuit filled with nothing good and few things of any consequence.

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The Adam-and-Eve Syndrome

Misti Thornhill

Upon analyzing three of Flannery O'Connor's stories, several interesting common themes appear, but the one I keep coming back to is the apparent lack of a husband in all of the stories. None of the leading protagonists has a man in her life, children excluded. Although this may be purely accidental on O'Connor's part, it is rather interesting to consider. What does this lack of a male force in the household have upon the other characters involved, and what does it say about the women?

While Mrs. Freeman's husband, in "Good Country People," apparently exists, the only mention he receives is from a man to whom Mrs. Hopewell speaks about the family's references. The man says, "Mr. Freeman was a good farmer," (O'Connor 181) and "I can stand him real good" (181). In the same story, we see Mrs. Hopewell, who "had divorced her husband long ago" (182). Both of these women have daughters, again no males. Joy-Hulga "looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity" (184). This is evidence of the negative influence Mrs. Hopewell has been on her daughter's ideas about men.

In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," we meet the Grandmother, who obviously places herself at the head of the family, even though she lives with her son and his family. No mention is ever made of her husband. She has much more control over things than does her son, even though he thinks he won the debate over the vacation destination. The Grandmother finds a way to manipulate the children to get her way, and ends up eating her words: "I wouldn't take my children in any direction with a criminal like that a loose in it. I couldn't answer to my conscience if I did" (193). Yet she does exactly that by leading her family right into the path of the Misfit. Her motivation seems to be self-gratification, not true concern for her family's safety. It is her undoing, trying to manipulate the Misfit, whom she apparently misjudged.

In "Everything That Rises Must Converge," while Julian is supposed to be the voice behind the story, it is his mother who

soon takes center stage. No mention is ever made of a man in her life either, only "that she had brought him up successfully..." (208). It is apparent that she controls Julian. She is constantly making him feel responsible for all she has had to sacrifice for his education and health. She takes all the credit for saving him, "after she had first created the necessity to do so by making a mess of things" (207).

The apparent male/evil connotation begins to show up by reading the subtle gray areas of these three stories. "Good Country People" introduces Manley Pointer as the apparent evil incarnate who takes the "good country people" of the story for a ride by betraying their trust. Mrs. Hopewell is truly taken by him as she announces, "he bored me to death but he was so sincere and genuine," "He was just good country people...just the salt of the earth" (187). In "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," the Misfit is the scapegoat and represents evil in the minds of most readers. He is the criminal who kills, but he says of his crimes, "I forget what I done...I set there and set there, trying to remember what it was I done and I ain't recalled it to this day" (201). The Grandmother, however, is very aware of her manipulation and covering up of her dishonesty: "The grandmother decided that she would not mention that the house was in Tennessee" (198). "Everything That Rises Must Converge," finds Julian being somehow blamed for his mother's racism and ultimate death. We see evidence of his guilt of her prejudice, "he made it a point to sit down beside a Negro, in reparation as it were for his mother's sins" (206). Although Julian wanted to teach his mother a lesson, "There was in him an evil urge to break her spirit," he never wanted her to pay with her life. Now he must surely feel burdened.

While all of these women seem to be concerned with the condition of the wicked and evil world, they fail to see the evil that lurks in their very existence and instead blame anything and anyone else for the lack of goodness in themselves. Mrs. Hopewell, in "Good Country People," laments "Why, I think there aren't enough good country people in the world! I think that's what's wrong with it!" (185). The Grandmother in "A Good Man is Hard To Find" states, "Everything is getting terrible. I remember the day you could go off and leave your screen door unlatched. Not no more" (197). Julian's mother in "Everything

That Rises Must Converge" snaps, "With the world in the mess it's in, it's a wonder we can enjoy anything. I tell you, the bottom rail is on the top" (205). It is wise to understand that in the world today, evil wears many faces, not the least of which could include a domineering mother/grandmother who destroys her children's lives, and all the while hides behind a smile and an apron. It is, after all, easier to blame the serpent.

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Man's Nature

Aimee Ahrend

Throughout his novel The Once and Future King, T.H. White tells the unique story of King Arthur. This novel begins with Arthur as a young boy and tells the story of his life as king. Life in Camelot was a mixture of good and bad times. The reader gains a true feeling of life in medieval days because White does his best to accurately describe what life was like in Camelot. All aspects of man are shown, which helps make the novel more realistic. White shows that, although man has a dualistic nature, without laws, the evil side will take control.

To create order and peace, Arthur decided to establish a Round Table. Arthur's idea for the table was that "Right was to be the important thing, not Might" (432). Before the table was created, mayhem was common throughout the land. Women and children could not safely venture outside the confines of their home. There were no civil laws, only the law of the land. Black knights paraded around and tried to create fights with innocent people. With the creation of the Round Table, order was restored to the land. Now, it was safe to do whatever one wanted to do. For a while, the Round Table was successful in keeping order and peace. The knights of the table quickly began to lose their insight. As King Arthur said, "We have run out of things to fight for, so all the fighters of the Table are going to rot...Now the Might is left, with nothing to use it on, so it is working a wicked channels for itself" (433). Knights now began to do whatever they wished to without caring about what the Table stood for.

Since the Table was falling apart from lack of things to do, Arthur thought it would be a good idea if the knights could go on a quest. His reasoning for this was that "If we are going to save it [The Round Table], it must be made a spiritual one" (434). The quest was supposed to unite the Table and restore it, but the quest had the opposite effect. At first, the knights agreed to the idea, thinking that it was a splendid one. At the end of their journey, it was apparent that the Holy Grail which

they wanted was not theirs to have. The journey killed many knights, and the others, who were left, were changed men. Loyalties were now changed and that would ultimately change the Table. Many of the remaining knights thought that their attention should be turned to God, and they spent their time pursuing God's grace. The other knights reverted to their old ways and began fighting.

Lancelot is an example of man turning evil without laws to guide him. Lancelot wanted to be a perfect, holy knight who could perform a miracle. He did his best as a knight to follow the code of chivalry and God's law. Although he tried hard, Lancelot was far from being perfect. Falling in love with a married woman would be his ultimate problem. Loving Guinevere was something that Lancelot knew was wrong, yet he could not help himself. Although Lancelot was unable to see the Grail, he was a changed man. After coming close to seeing the Grail, Lancelot decides to put his past mistakes behind him and be one with God again. Lancelot was thankful for the adventure because it reopened his eyes to God, "...and I thanked God for that adventure" (466). Knowing that he was unable to see the Grail because of Guinevere, Lancelot decided that things would have to be different between the two of them. Lancelot thought he could get Guinevere to love God and that would make things morally perfect. Guinevere agreed at first but then changed her mind. She thought Lancelot was being selfish, so she became angry with him. Lancelot was confused and told her things could go back to the way they were before the quest. In this simple action, Lancelot partly forgot about God and his quest to be morally perfect again.

White shows that man is capable of being morally correct. Yet, he also shows that man has the ability to lose sight of God and do things that are against God's law. In this novel, very few of the characters let the moral side of their personality rule over their lives. The Round Table was created to establish control of man and the lands in which he lived. When the knights ran out of things to work for, they began to go back to their old ideals and ways of living. It was shown that man has the capacity to be good if he would only think before acting. Many of Lancelot's troubles came because he wanted to be the best knight, yet he could not stop himself from loving his best

friend's wife. White tries to show that man can be good as long as there are laws and goals for man to achieve. Without laws, the evil side takes control and often ruins man.

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Scholarship Award
Wesson Attendance Center

Informal Essay

The Walls of Life

Misti Thornhill

I can still hear her say, "Come on in, Sister," as she pinched me under the arm. That was always her welcome. Grandma stood at the stove, sweat dripping from her scarce hair, shaking her dumpling bowl. "They must be shaken so they don't stick. Always remember that, Sister."

She never looked up as I entered, but I never doubted her pleasure at my presence. She lived for it, for the many kids, grandkids, and great-grandkids who flooded the house on such days. She had a way of keeping her focus on the food, while reaching around us with a free arm and pinching the smallest bit of skin under the arm. It hurt like nothing else, but I never complained. It was her way.

She toiled over dinner until it was ready; we laughed, talked and hugged while the table was set. Our large, close family packed the house, and sometimes boyfriends, girlfriends and friends came along. There was always room, and no one left a stranger. There were wall-to-wall hugs, as I was passed from arm to arm. There seemed to be a continuous line of adults ready to give a big hearty bear hug, even if they had only seen you a week earlier. Some lived out of town, and hugs weren't as frequent, so they were even more welcomed. The yard and bedrooms overflowed with children and teens, talking and playing while waiting to eat.

More than good food was shared at Grandma's house. The walls of that three-bedroom home saw and heard many laughs and tears. People used to ride past the modest-sized home and would see the automobiles outside and wonder how we all fit. They often said in amazement and with much humor, "We saw the walls breathing when we passed."

Those walls did breathe. They breathed because they were full of the many lives represented in the Sisco family. The walls of the kitchen were lined with faces; some deceased, some living far away, and many younger versions of adults and teens who were present. They breathed because they contained love that gave them a life of their own.

When Grandma Sisco drifted from my life and into heaven's bosom, the family sold our house of memories. I grieved in double measure, once for the woman that to me epitomized grace, love, and hard work; another for the home that held so many of my memories. If I couldn't keep Grandma, I wanted to cling to the house that smelled like her, and contained her "things." As for the "things," we each got something of hers to keep. My choices were an old worn blanket I used to play with as a child, the flannel gown she left lying across her bed when she left this world, and a plaque that announced Christ as the "head of this house."

As for the house, I've dreamed many times of going back to visit and finding her there, cooking her famous mouth-watering dumplings. I've longed to go see the house's interior, to see if some part of her still floats around in that home that I still remember so vividly.

Then I think of her and it's then that I know that she lives wherever I am. She's in my heart, not in that house. She's where I take her, at family reunions, wherever there's food and laughter. The yard contains little evidence that an army of grandkids once played beside a giant cedar that someone chose to eradicate. The garden Grandma loved so much is now a child's play yard encamped by chain-linked walls, keeping the past out or inside away from my grasp.

No one can take my memories. As long as I somehow keep them present, whether in my mind, in photos or in these simple words. As long as I can always hear her say, "Come on in, Sister." Maybe one day when I cross over, she will be the one to greet me, and those words will be once again more than mere echoes from the walls of my heart.

It Shows

Carlos Garcia

All people are different. That usually means that all people have different laws they live by. With all the different people in the world as role models, I was fortunate enough to pay attention to my dad. My dad showed and taught me many lessons while he was with me. Through my dad's examples, I learned that being persistent pays.

My dad, Carlos Selso Garcia, Jr., was born in the Mississippi Delta. Although he did go to high school, marrying at a young age forced him to drop out of college. At nineteen he had his first child, my older sister Carla. Nearly two years later he had a son, me. At age twenty-one he had a spouse and two children. We did not have much and lived in my dad's truck. Realizing that if he wanted a different life for his family, he would have to work hard and not give up.

Later my dad was informed about a maintenance job. He applied for the job, and soon we were off to Brookhaven, Mississippi. He was now a new maintenance man for Sunbelt Management Company at Brookhaven apartments. It was not a high dollar job, but he worked his hardest and was noticed. The property manager of those apartments offered my dad the manager's job. He also started working at two other apartment complexes. With three complexes, my dad earned more money. My dad was doing well for himself. Just before he was twenty-seven, he had his third child, my younger sister, Monica. Shortly after the birth we moved out of the apartments and got a house. It was not the best house at all, but it was ours. My dad would go to work in the morning and come home at night and work on the house. Things were getting better, and my dad was still doing his best. Just then my dad quit his job after he felt he was getting treated wrongly. Now my dad was working nights loading trucks.

Soon my dad's ex-employer, the owner of Sunbelt Management Company, wanted my dad back. My dad explained the reason he quit and refused. Then he was offered a promotion and raise. This time he went back as a property manager.

Now he was over all the managers and maintenance men in his area. This was great, except it called for my dad to travel. He really had to work hard now. He had to keep up with people with college degrees. Although he was less educated than most of the workers, his hard work and determination showed. He got property manager of the year two times and was promoted again. This time he was over all of the property managers. He was the least educated property manager and was chosen to lead all of them. He still worked hard at this job. Tragedy then struck and ended it all for him. On the afternoon of December 20, 1996, he was killed on his way home after being struck by an eighteen-wheeler. My family received a letter from Sunbelt Management Company. It informed us that as of January 1997, he was to be promoted again and would take over a third of the company. It also told us that he was aware of that; he just was waiting to surprise us.

Personally, I am very proud of what my dad accomplished. He died at a young age but had many accomplishments. He started off at the lowest level of his company and ended up at the top. He always told me that if I did not do it, someone else would, and anything could be achieved. This story is why I think persistence is the law to live by.

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